

G. W. G. Ferris House
311 W. Third St.
Carson City
Nevada

HABS NO. NEV-13-14

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY HABS No. NEV-13-14

GEORGE WASHINGTON GALE FERRIS SR. HOUSE

Location: 311 West Third Street (SE Corner W. Third Street and S. Division Street), Carson City, Nevada

Present Owner: Mr. and Mrs. Charles Herron

Present Occupant: Mr. and Mrs. Herron

Present Use: Dwelling

Statement of Significance: An attractive nineteenth century house with later, elaborate Colonial Revival interior trim. This building was the boyhood home of the inventor of the Ferris Wheel.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of Erection: c. 1869. G.W.G. Ferris bought the property in 1868 from the Sears, who had subdivided this portion of Carson City. The 1868-69 Directory for Nevada Territory lists "Ferris, George W., Farmer" as residing on "3rd, between Nevada and Division" which is the property in question. Stylistically, the original portions of the house accord well with this date.
2. Architect: none known
3. Original and subsequent owners:

The Ferris House is located on lots 2 and 3 of Block 28 of Sears, Thompson, and Sears Division of Carson City. The following references tracing the title of these lots are found in the Ormsby County, Nevada Deed Books:

1868 Deed, March 10, 1868, recorded in Book 11, page 608. George W.G. Ferris bought from G.A. Sears and Mary A. Sears the west half of Block 28 (comprising lots 2, 3, 6, 7 and 10), the east half of Block 32, and also lot no. 2 in Block 32 of Sears, Thompson and Sears Division. Price \$1,800.

1890 Deed, September 9, 1890, recorded in Book 25, page 292. G.W.G. Ferris (now of Riverside, San Bernardino County, California) bought from H.F. Dangberg of

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Douglas County, Nevada several properties in Carson City; among which was the remainder of Block 28, for \$10,000.

1890 Deed, September 9, 1890 recorded in Book 27, page 180. Mary F. Ardery of Carson City bought all of Block 28 from G.W.G. Ferris for \$3,000. (Mary Ferris Ardery was the daughter of G.W.G. Ferris).

1922 Deed, May 11, 1922 recorded in Book 37, page 365. Narick E. Maher and Mary M. B. Maher bought all of Block 28 from Mary F. Ardery for \$6,330.

In the late 1930's Mrs. Maher sold off portions of the property, keeping only lots 2 and 3 on which the house was built, and lot 6 as a unit.

1956 Deed February 28, 1956, recorded in Deed Book 67, page 515. Thurman W. Cross bought lots 2, 3 and 6 in Block 28 from John R. Ross and Margaret B. Ross.

1968 Deed April 25, 1968, recorded in Official Records Book 75, page 58. Ferdinand Hirzy and wife bought lots 2, 3 and 6 in Block 28 from Thurman W. Cross and Belle M. Cross.

1968 Deed July 8, 1968 recorded in Official Records, Book 77, page 467. Charles W. Herron and Corine Herron, husband and wife, bought lots 2, 3 and 6 in Block 28 from Ferdinand Hirzy and wife.

4. Original plans, construction, etc: none known
5. Alterations and additions: The earliest known representation of the house is the small scale drawing shown in an 1875 "Birds Eye View of Carson City." This shows the house to be essentially the same in shape and outline as it is today. A 1916 photograph of the north facade shows this portion of the house to be virtually unchanged. It should be noted, however, that the detail and trim of the front porch, which also carry over to the front bay, and which appear in this photograph, do not reflect original construction. This exterior trim was more than likely altered at the time of the major interior renovations.

The interior of the house has received far more alteration

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than the exterior. (The various and specific changes are noted in Part II of this report) It will suffice here to say that the woodwork, in scale and design, seems to reflect the "neo-Colonial" style, popular in the 1890's and early 1900's. Trim is of extremely small scale, and classical motifs, such as egg and dart moldings and urns are used repeatedly. These details were much in vogue at the time of, and largely as a result of, the Chicago World's Fair (The World's Columbian Exposition) of 1893. It may well be that the Arderys, who owned the house from 1890 to 1920, decided to modernize it in keeping with the "Eastern" fashion promulgated at the fair. This connection with the fair may have been quite a strong one, inasmuch as Mrs. Ardery's brother played a major role by providing one of the Midway's major attractions. (See Historical Events and Persons Associated with the Building).

In addition to changes of trim and detail, the plan and usage of spaces has changed over the years. The south wing is now a separate apartment, and the dining room was formerly a part of the kitchen. The roof, of red cedar shakes, was installed by Mr. Burd Lindsay, during the Ardery's ownership.

B. Historical Events and Persons Associated With The Building:

George Washington Gale Ferris, Sr. came to Nevada with his family from Galesburg, Illinois in 1864. According to tradition he, Mrs. Gale and their children crossed the plains in a carriage, not in a covered wagon. The family settled first at a farm in Carson Valley. In addition to the usual farm products, Ferris planted trees of many varieties, to the extent that he was singled out for particular mention in the following passages from Thompson and West's History of Nevada:

"A prominent feature of the agriculture of 1871-72 was the attempt, or the beginning of planting and raising shade, ornamental and forest trees. The most prominent man in connection with this was G.W.G. Ferris, who imported a great number of eastern forest trees, such as hickory, black walnut, chestnut, etc."

"What is home without fruit trees - apple, pear or orange, or grapevines, as the case may be? He who plants fruit trees is intending to stay. In Ormsby County were 125 walnut trees, 125 elms, 300 box-elder, 1,000 white maples, presumably the property of G.W.G. Ferris, who had manifested a commendable enterprise in the planting."

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The Ferris family remained in Carson Valley for several years, but by 1869 had moved to Carson City. The 1868-69 Nevada Directory shows that Mr. Ferris was still primarily interested in agriculture in listing the occupant of the house at 3rd and Division Streets as "Ferris, George W., farmer."

George Washington Gale Ferris, Jr., who was to become the most prominent figure associated with the house, was a young boy when the family moved to town. He was born in Galesburg on February 14, 1859, came with the family to Nevada in 1864 and after 1869, spent his youthful years in the house here-in discussed. He later graduated from a military academy in Oakland, California, and 1881 graduated in engineering from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

After a short period in which he was associated with railroad and coal interests in West Virginia, he began to become primarily involved in bridge building. He also became expert in testing and inspecting structural steel and organized the firm of G.W.G. Ferris and Co. of Pittsburgh, to conduct such work in shops and foundries throughout the country.

While the value of Ferris' contributions in these fields is undisputed, it was a more dramatic work that made his name become a household word.

In 1892, Daniel M. Burnham gave a challenge to American Engineers. He asked that they produce something for the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 which would rival the Eiffel Tower, erected for the Paris Exposition. Ferris rose to the occasion with his gigantic wheel. The wheel cost \$390,000 and took some six months to fabricate. It was built in Pittsburgh, taken down, and reassembled in Chicago. Although Ferris had received little encouragement on his invention, it soon became one of the major attractions at the fair.

The original "Ferris Wheel" was 250 feet tall, had thirty-six cars, each holding some forty passengers, and took twenty minutes to make a full revolution. The daring of its design, the precision of the machine work involved in its construction, and the accuracy of its movements, as well as its huge size, won for the wheel the admiration of engineers and the hearty approval of fairgoers.

Ferris returned to Pittsburgh from the Fair, and died there in 1896 at the age of thirty-seven. He was survived by his wife, Margaret Beatty.

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Literally and figuratively, Ferris' wheel lived on after him. The original wheel was taken down after the Chicago fair, and was erected again nine years later for the St. Louis World's Fair of 1904. It was then dismantled, and the parts sold for scrap. Its progeny, though usually much smaller than the parent, are found in countless fairs, carnivals, and circuses throughout this country and abroad.

Family tradition has it that Ferris conceived the idea of his wheel from his early days in Nevada, where he would watch the waterwheels on the Carson River which were used to crush the ore from Virginia City.

In 1890, the elder Ferris, who had moved to California, sold the house (and all of Block 28) to his daughter, Mary Ferris Ardery. Mrs. Ardery, who lived in the house until the early 1920's, was married to Alexander M. Ardery on September 29, 1880. Ardery, born in New York State in 1850, had come west in 1861 with his parents. In 1870, he was employed by the Virginia and Truckee Railroad as a telegraph operator and assistant dispatcher. In 1881, he became chief dispatcher, and in August 1883, Master of Transportation. In 1909, he became Vice-President and General Manager, replacing Henry M. Yerington, who had died the previous month (see HABS No. NEV-13-18, H.M. Yerington House). After his death, his widow continued to live in the house until 1922, when it passed out of the hands of the Ferris Family.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views:

"Birds Eye View of Carson City, Ormsby County, Nevada, 1875" drawn by Augustus Koch, published by Britton, Rey and Co., Lith, San Francisco, 1875. Copy in the Nevada State Museum, Carson City.

A photograph of the W. Third Street facade, dated 1916, in possession of Mrs. Marshall Humphreys, shows the house as it is today.

2. Bibliography:

Davis, Sam. P., ed. The History of Nevada, Reno: The Elms Publishing Co., 1913.

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Johnson, Allen, and Malone, Dumas, eds. Dictionary of American Biography. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931. Vol. VI.

Thompson, Thomas H., and West, Albert A., History of Nevada. Berkeley: Howell-North, 1958.

Prepared by: S. Allen Chambers, Jr.
Architectural Historian
National Park Service
December, 1972

PART II ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Merit and Interest: This one-and-a-half story, late nineteenth century house has attractive interior features and significant historical associations.
2. Condition of fabric: Fairly good. Recently some rooms have been refurbished.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: Approximately 60' x 60'. The plan is complex being roughly a T with various offsets and projections.
2. Foundations: Large squared sandstone blocks form a low foundation below a wooden water table.
3. Walls: The walls are covered with beveled siding between corner boards.
4. Structural system: The frame is of rough sawn, dimension timber.
5. Porches: At the north front a square distyle entrance porch occupies in part the angle between the front wall and a large bay window, beyond which it projects. Two unfluted columns with angular Ionic capitals having large volutes similar to those of the Temple of Apollo at Bassae. Two pilasters serve as responds. The Greek Ionic-type entablature contains a dentilled cornice. The porch has balustraded

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railings, narrow pine floor boards and a half hipped roof. Secondary porches are located on the west elevation toward the rear, and on the east elevation in a re-entrant angle.

6. Chimneys: Three brick chimneys are located at or near the roof ridge.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and Doors: The main (north) entrance is set within a paneled reveal trimmed with an architrave. The door, which appears to date from the 1890's, is glazed with single pane of diamond pattern pressed glass. Below is a small horizontal moulded panel and a nearly square panel ornamented with a wreath of applied composition.
 - b. Windows: A number of windows appear to be original and have plain trim with moulded caps. The double hung, one over one light sash may be replacements.

In each gable a small "pointed" window, a two-centered pointed arch, with plain trim has one over one light sash.

Three first floor windows, one on the east elevation and two on the west, appear to have been installed in the 1890's. The horizontally rectangular openings have high sills, plain trim and moulded caps. Each contains beveled plate glass in a geometrical pattern, consisting of elongated vertical hexagons between diamond-shaped pieces.

The bay window which appears to be of original construction, on the north front is rectangular in plan, with a double front window a single side window. The openings have semicircular heads and double-hung, two over two light sash. Between the openings and at their sides, are round-headed panels. Below the moulded string course of the sill are moulded panels. The roof of the bay window is continuous with the north porch roof and has a matching cornice.

8. Roof:
 - a. Shape and Covering: The main roof is gabled and is covered with wood shingles. However, the porches have half hipped roofs.

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- b. Cornice: A boxed cornice having a small covetto bed moulding is completed with a cyma recta crown moulding. The cornice has returns at the gable ends, and extends up the rakes. A wide frieze board is below the bed moulding. There are no gutters.
- c. Dormers: One shed dormer on the west elevation breaks the eaves.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plans

- a. First Floor: The north wing, the base of the T plan, has an entrance hall on the east side and a living room at the west side. To the south is a long room with the main stair in the west portion.

The south wing contains a large room on the east, the master bedroom; and one on the west, the dining room; smaller rooms along the south side, the breakfast room, kitchen, and wine-cellar. A secondary stair is located between the master bedroom and the dining room.

- b. Second Floor: The room layout is a somewhat modified version of the first-floor layout, being curtailed by the roof.

2. Interior Finish

- a. General: A number of original features remain in the north bay window, the large room containing the principal stair, and at the second story. The first-story rooms of the north front, and the principal stair, appear to have been almost entirely remodeled with the use of Georgian Revival details popular in the 1890's. Some rooms at the south end of the first story have had still later alterations, but some, such as the kitchen, still contain early trim. The flooring is of five-inch pine boards, under modern carpeting.
- b. Entrance Hall: The entrance door is at the north end, and a high horizontal window of leaded beveled plate glass is on the east wall. A door is at the south end and a flat arched opening is on the west side connecting the front living room. Door and window openings have architrave trim, the mouldings are very delicate in scale and some are enriched with egg and dart and bead

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and reel. Each opening has a cap with a dentil course and small mouldings. Some architraves have two fascias, others have three. Picture moulding extends around the dentil course.

In the flat arched opening, are two unfluted columns on paneled pedestals. The column capitals are angular Ionic with an enriched low relief anthemion band as necking. Above the pedestals, is a narrow opening between each jamb and the adjacent column. This woodwork is now painted white. Originally, it may have been varnished as is the outside face of the front door.

- c. Front living room: On the east wall is the columned opening. A fireplace is centered on the south wall and a doorway adjoins it to the east. On the west wall a high horizontal window is similar to the entrance hall window. On the north side the central portion opens to a rectangular bay window. The head of this opening is a semi-elliptical arch with a keystone supported on consoles above paneled pilasters. Extending around the three sides of the bay is a window seat above paneling. The fireplace is located on a projecting chimney breast. Around the firebox is a fascia of brick and a wooden architrave, Doric colonnettes support a mantel shelf. The brick hearth may be a replacement. The remaining trim in this room is similar to that of the entrance hall.
- d. Room containing the principal stair: This room is divided into two unequal areas by a wide, moulded ceiling beam. The eastern area, which is the larger, has two windows on the east wall and a doorway on the south wall near the east corner, all with older type architrave trim. The door has four moulded panels.

The western end contains a stairway whose lower flight and landing are centered on the west wall. Above the landing is a horizontal window like the entrance hall window. Several steps lead to the landing, above which the stair ascends along the west wall and turns, with winders, to land near the middle of the north wing at the second floor. The soffit and the low wall under the stair are wood, treated with very small moulded panels. The open string has turned balusters, and ornamental step ends. Newels at each angle are square in plan in the lower paneled portion, round and moulded in the central portion, square and paneled above, and completed with finials above the railing.

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- e. Southern Rooms: There have been alterations in plan in this part of the house. Wainscoting with vertical matched and beaded boards remains. The kitchen retains four-panel doors and architrave trim, as well as wooden wainscoting.
 - f. Second-story rooms: Some openings have plain trim, and four-paneled doors, unmoulded but with raised fields in the panels. Other openings have architrave trim and four panel doors.
3. Wall and Ceiling Finish: The plaster on lath is painted.
4. Notable equipment: A number of old brass electric wall sconces remain which originally may have been gas fixtures. Between kitchen and breakfast room large hinges provide for a double swinging door.

D. Site and Surroundings:

The house on level terrain faces north onto Third Street with Division Street at the west side. A wooden picket fence is similar to the one shown in the 1916 photograph. At the south there was an artesian well, of which no trace remains.

Prepared by: Harley J. McKee
Supervisory Architect
National Park Service
Date of Visit: August 18, 1972

PART III. Project Information

These records are part of the documentation made during the latter half of 1972 and the summer of 1973 in a project undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the Nevada State Park System to record structures in Carson City and nearby areas.

The project was under the general supervision of John Poppeliers, Chief, Historic American Buildings Survey. Eric R. Cronkhite, Administrator, Nevada State Park System, and Mrs. Marshall Humphreys of the Nevada Landmarks Society assisted the HABS recorders in Nevada. Professor Harley J. McKee, Supervisory Architect, National Park Service, selected the subjects and provided architectural data for the sixteen Carson City structures which were recorded. Historical documentation for these buildings was prepared by S. Allen Chambers, Jr., Architectural Historian, Historic American Buildings Survey. Project Supervisor for the 1973 Nevada Summer Team,

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which produced the measured drawings, was Robert L. Hartwig of Harvard University. Student assistant architects were John T. M. Creery (University of Utah), Robert P. Mizell (University of Florida), and Jack W. Schafer (University of Cincinnati). Photographs were made by Aaron A. Gallup of Sacramento, California.